

Rescue and rehabilitation of an Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*) fledgling at Nagpur, Maharashtra



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On the evening of 28th June 2009 information was received that an Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*) fledgling was being attacked by a flock House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) and the fledgling was lying on the ground in Sakkardara locality of Nagpur city. People had gathered there to see the 'unusual' bird. Hence the parent Hornbills could not come down to rescue or defend the hapless fledgling. The fledgling was rescued and kept at residence of a nature enthusiast, Mr. Minitesh Tapre for the night.

On 29th June 2009, it was brought to the first author's residence. We found that the fledgling was slightly injured because of the attack by the House Crows. At the same time it was in a dazed and distressed condition.

On that day, we force-fed it with ripe berries of Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) (n=2), ripe Jamun berries (*Syzygium cumini*) (n=4) and ripe Umbar (*Ficus racemosa*) (n=1) fig. All these fruits were collected fresh from the trees nearby the researcher's house. We tried to force-feed it with a Garden Lizard (*Calotes versicolor*) but it did not swallow it

for a long time. Hence it was discarded. The fledgling was kept in a separate room. It perched on a small stick which was brought and kept in the room between two supports. The fledgling roosted on the stick with neck retracted in the shoulders for the night.

The fledgling was again force-fed with Piplal figs (*Ficus religiosa*) (n=2) and *F. racemosa* figs (n=3). It was observed that the fledgling was regurgitating the large seeds of Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) and Jamun (*Syzygium cumini*) through the bill and not excreting it. Also it regurgitated the thin skin of the Neem berries through the bill. In the afternoon the fledgling became active and started taking small flights in the house. It flew away when we approached it for force-feeding. It hid itself behind the baggage in the house.

Also, if food was kept in front of the fledgling in a plate or even if the food was offered to the fledgling by hands, the fledgling did not consume it. Hence, the fledgling was again force-fed with one fig of Jamun and one fig of Umbar in the evening. This night the fledgling roosted in a tyre of a

motorcycle which was hanging in the gallery of the house. Probably, the tyre looked like a natural hanging branch forming a loop.

On 30th June 2009, the author along with Mr. Gopal Thosar (Honorary Wildlife Warden of Nagpur district) and Dr. Anil Pimpalapure (renowned birder of Nagpur) tried to locate the parents of this hornbill fledgling at the same place from where it was rescued. But no hornbills were sighted in the area. So the attempt of releasing the fledgling was given up for the day. The fledgling was given a diet of Curry Leaf (*Murraya koenigii*) berries (n=4), Banyan figs (*Ficus benghalensis*) (n=2) and Jamun berries (n=4).

On 1st July 2009, we started locating the hornbills in the area from 0530 hours at the same place from where the fledgling was rescued. At 0545 hours an adult Hornbill was located on a Pipal tree. Immediately the fledgling was released on a small Banyan tree (near the Pipal tree) studded with ripe figs, hoping that adult Hornbills will locate the lost fledgling again. The fledgling flew and hopped clumsily among the branches of the Banyan tree. It settled in a leafy branch. It called every few minutes.

The first author waited at the spot till 0730 hours. However, we informed some of our birder friends to keep a watch on the released fledgling on the tree. At 1400 hours, Mr. Tarun Balpande, an enthusiastic birder, merrily informed us that two were feeding the fledgling on the same tree.

Then we along with Mr. Gopal Thosar, Dr. Anil Pimpalapure and Aditya Joshi, enthusiastic birders, joined Tarun at the spot at 1700 hours. The fledgling was still perched in the same tree. At 1715 hours a male Hornbill arrived and fed seven figs of Pipal (*Ficus religiosa*) to the fledgling. The male flew back to the nearby Pipal tree. It came back to the fledgling and fed it with one fig each of Pipal and Banyan within next few minutes.

At 1727 hours the male flew to the nearby Pipal tree and the fledgling also took a strong flight to the tree. Here the male continued feeding the fledgling. Both hopped in the tree.

At 1730 hours a House Crow attacked the Hornbill fledgling. The fledgling fell off from the perch and flew clumsily to a nearby small tree branch. The male Hornbill aggressively guarded the fledgling and escorted it to a dense tree. It agitatedly flew to the fledgling and to an electric wire. The male hornbill called "keeeya" many times (presumably to summon the female). Some Common Mynas mobbed the male hornbill but it did not pay much attention to them. At 1735 hours both the hornbills flew back to the Pipal tree. Then both the hornbills hopped among the branches of the tree till 1745 hours when the observations were stopped.

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